

REINSPECTION REPORT

Medway LEA Reinspection

12 May 2006



ADULT LEARNING
INSPECTORATE

Adult Learning Inspectorate

The Adult Learning Inspectorate (ALI) was established under the provisions of the *Learning and Skills Act 2000* to bring the inspection of all aspects of adult learning and work-based learning within the remit of a single inspectorate. The ALI is responsible for inspecting a wide range of government-funded learning, including:

- work-based learning for all people aged over 16
- provision in further education colleges for people aged 19 and over
- **learndirect** provision
- Adult and Community Learning
- training funded by Jobcentre Plus
- education and training in prisons, at the invitation of Her Majesty's Chief Inspector of Prisons
- adult information, advice and guidance services (**nextstep**).

Inspections are carried out in accordance with the Common Inspection Framework by teams of full-time inspectors and part-time associate inspectors who have knowledge of, and experience in, the work which they inspect. All providers are invited to nominate a senior member of their staff to participate in the inspection as a team member.

Overall effectiveness

The grades given for areas of learning and leadership and management will be used to arrive at a judgement about the overall effectiveness of the provider.

An **outstanding** provider should typically have leadership and management and at least half of the areas of learning judged to be a grade 1. All area of learning grades will be graded 1 or 2.

A **good** provider should have leadership and management and at least half of the area of learning grades judged to be a grade 2 or better. A good training provider should not have any grade 4s, and few grade 3s in the areas of learning.

A **satisfactory** provider should have adequate or better grades in leadership and management and in at least two thirds of the area of learning grades. An adequate provider might have a range of grades across areas of learning, some of which might be graded 4.

Provision will normally be deemed to be **inadequate** where more than one third of the area of learning grades and/or leadership and management are judged to be inadequate.

The final decision as to whether the provision is inadequate rests with the Chief Inspector of Adult Learning.

Grading

Inspectors use a four-point scale to summarise their judgements about the quality of provision in occupational/curriculum areas and Jobcentre Plus programmes, as well as to summarise their judgements about the quality of learning sessions. The same scale is used to describe the quality of leadership and management, which includes equality of opportunity and quality assurance. The descriptors for the four grades are:

- *grade 1 - outstanding*
- *grade 2 - good*
- *grade 3 - satisfactory*
- *grade 4 - inadequate*

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REINSPECTION REPORT

DESCRIPTION OF THE PROVIDER

1. Since the previous inspection, Medway Adult and Community Learning Service (MACLS) has been moved from education and leisure into Medway Council's (the council) newly formed community services directorate, under economic development, skills and leisure. Medway is a designated city of the Thames Gateway. MACLS identifies regeneration as a fundamental part of the future of the area. Its funding is mainly from Kent and Medway Learning and Skills Council (LSC), supplemented by income from learners' fees. MACLS also receives levels of additional funding in relation to specific projects.

2. An adult learning manager manages the service and reports to the assistant director of the economic development, skills and leisure directorate. An advisory board, with representatives from the council, along with other stakeholders including the local LSC, advise on quality, staffing, planning and funding issues. The adult learning manager, along with two other senior managers represent a small strategic management group, who between them have responsibilities for business services, marketing, quality improvement, staff development, and equality and diversity. There are 33 curriculum posts, of which six are full time. MACLS offers learning facilities at three main centres, situated in Gillingham and Rochester, and these are supported by six other venues throughout the area, including schools and a library. MACLS also uses a variety of community venues as required. It offers courses in 13 areas of learning but some have small numbers of learners. In 2004-05, there were approximately 16,393 enrolments by 9,238 learners. Enrolments for 2005-06, to 31 March 2006 are 11,478 by 7,051 learners.

3. Medway is the largest unitary council in the Southeast. According to the 2001 census, the area has a total population of 249,502, with a relatively young population. The number of people aged 65 and over is lower than the national average of 12.6 per cent, and 21.1 per cent of people are aged 14 and under, compared with the national average of 18.9 per cent. It is a diverse area that contains very affluent areas alongside areas of deprivation. Of the population, 23.4 per cent have poor literacy skills and 24 per cent have poor numeracy skills. Skills provision for families is a service priority. The proportion of people with no qualifications in Medway is consistent with the national average, but only 8.6 per cent of people in Medway are educated to degree level or higher, compared with 14.2 per cent nationally. Small and medium-sized enterprises account for 96 per cent of businesses in the area.

OVERALL EFFECTIVENESS

Reinspection Grade 2

4. The previous inspection in April 2005 found that the organisation's leadership and management and arrangements for quality improvement were inadequate. Its equality of opportunity arrangements were satisfactory, as was the provision in English, languages and communications, family learning and foundation programmes. The provision in ICT was good. In hospitality, sport and leisure and in visual and performing arts and media the provision was inadequate.

5. **At the end of the reinspection process, the overall effectiveness of the provision is good.** Leadership and management are good and the arrangements for quality improvement and equality of opportunity are satisfactory. In information and communications technology (ICT) the provision is outstanding. In foundation programmes and family learning the provision is good. In hospitality, sport and leisure, and in visual and performing arts and media, the provision is satisfactory.

6. **The inspection team was broadly confident in the reliability of the self-assessment process.** An interim self-assessment report had been prepared to evaluate their progress in implementing the post-inspection action plan, and to identify the effectiveness in improving quality since the previous inspection in April 2005. MACLS is using data effectively to identify the progress.

7. **The provider has demonstrated that it is in a good position to make improvements.** Inspection grades have improved and all areas that were previously identified as unsatisfactory are now satisfactory. The organisation has implemented procedures to monitor learners' progress and to improve the standard of teaching. It uses data well to make decisions.

GRADES

grade 1 = outstanding, grade 2 = good, grade 3 = satisfactory, grade 4 = inadequate

Grades awarded at previous inspection

Leadership and management		4
Contributory grades:		
Equality of opportunity		3
Quality improvement		4

Information & communications technology			2
Contributory areas:	Number of learners	Contributory grade	
<i>Using IT</i>		2	
Adult and community learning	439	2	

Hospitality, sport, leisure & travel			4
Contributory areas:	Number of learners	Contributory grade	
<i>Leisure, sport and recreation</i>		4	
Adult and community learning	1,047	4	

Visual & performing arts & media		4
Contributory areas:	Number of learners	Contributory grade
<i>Other contributory areas</i> Adult and community learning	1,244	4

English, languages & communications		3
Contributory areas:	Number of learners	Contributory grade
<i>Other contributory areas</i> Adult and community learning	1,600	3

Foundation programmes		3
Contributory areas:	Number of learners	Contributory grade
<i>ESOL</i> Adult and community learning	520	3 3
<i>Literacy and numeracy</i> Adult and community learning	467	3 3
<i>Independent living and leisure skills</i> Adult and community learning	167	4 4

Family learning		3
Contributory areas:	Number of learners	Contributory grade
<i>Adult and community learning</i> Adult and community learning	586	3 3

Grades awarded at reinspection

Leadership and management		2
Contributory grades:		
Equality of opportunity		3
Quality improvement		3

Information & communications technology		1
Contributory areas:	Number of learners	Contributory grade
<i>Using IT</i> Adult and community learning	419	1 1

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Hospitality, sport, leisure & travel		3
Contributory areas:	Number of learners	Contributory grade
<i>Leisure, sport and recreation</i>		3
Adult and community learning	815	3

Visual & performing arts & media		3
Contributory areas:	Number of learners	Contributory grade
<i>Arts</i>		3
Adult and community learning	1,746	3

Foundation programmes		2
Contributory areas:	Number of learners	Contributory grade
<i>ESOL</i>		2
Adult and community learning	501	2
<i>Literacy and numeracy</i>		3
Adult and community learning	365	3

Family learning		2
Contributory areas:	Number of learners	Contributory grade
<i>Adult and community learning</i>		2
Adult and community learning	239	2

ABOUT THE REINSPECTION

8. ICT, hospitality, sport, leisure and travel, visual and performing arts and media, and foundation, including two contributory areas of literacy and numeracy and ESOL, were reinspected. English, languages and communications were sampled as part of the evidence to support leadership and management.

Number of inspectors	7
Number of inspection days	38
Number of learners interviewed	417
Number of staff interviewed	80
Number of locations/sites/learning centres visited	32
Number of partners/external agencies interviewed	10
Number of visits	4

KEY FINDINGS

Achievements and standards

9. **Achievement rates are very good and improving in ICT.** The learners' attainment of skills and knowledge is good and work is of a consistently high standard. They use the skills that they develop effectively in the workplace and to meet their personal and vocational goals.

10. **Practical work is of a high standard in visual and performing arts and media.** Achievement rates for accredited courses are good and the retention rate has improved to 93 per cent. There is little personal design development.

11. **In sport and leisure activities, learners are fully engaged and highly motivated.** Health and social benefits are good. Achievement rates are satisfactory, as is the retention rate.

12. **Attendance rates and achievement have much improved in English for speakers of other languages (ESOL).** Attainment is very good and learners are fully able to use English in their lives and work. Progression routes are clear and the retention rate is good, but the opportunities to achieve accreditation are insufficient.

13. **In literacy and numeracy, retention rates are good and achievement rates are improving.** Progression is good and attendance rates are satisfactory. Learners develop increased confidence and extend these new skills to their personal, family and working life.

14. **Family learning retention rates are high.** Achievement is satisfactory. Good personal skills, particularly self-confidence and self-esteem are well developed. Attendance is satisfactory. Punctuality was good but late arrivals are not challenged sufficiently.

The quality of provision

15. **Teaching is consistently good in sport, ESOL and family learning and very good in ICT.** Tutors use a wide variety of activities to maintain the learners' interest and to meet their needs. Lessons are well planned. There are good progression routes and a wide range of options are available for learners in these subjects. Initial assessment is satisfactory.

16. Support and guidance is generally satisfactory across the provision, but are good in literacy and numeracy.

17. In ICT, the organisation's recording of learners' progress is good. MACLS's recording of learners' progress is satisfactory in sport, and visual and performing arts and media.

18. There are not enough places in art sessions and MACLS does not carry out initial assessment against specific course outcomes. For example, for those learners required to paint landscapes using oil paints, their initial assessment does not ascertain their ability to use this medium.

19. In literacy and numeracy, insufficient attention is given to learning. Lessons do not

focus sufficiently on the needs of individuals and rely excessively on handouts and working exercises in textbooks. Teaching methods are insufficiently varied and do not involve the learners sufficiently.

20. Although the teaching in family learning is interesting and engages the learners while meeting their individual needs, planning for some lessons is insufficiently thorough. Schemes of work often fail to focus on meeting the needs of adults to support their children's learning.

Leadership and management

21. The management of the curriculum ranges from outstanding to satisfactory. **In ICT and ESOL, there is a strong focus on continuous improvement and strong attention to rectifying the weaknesses identified in the previous inspection.** In those areas that are satisfactory, monitoring visits are carried out on course files but some are incomplete or insufficiently detailed.

22. **Strategies to deal with the weaknesses at the previous inspection have been good.** Successful realignment of the organisation within the council has raised its profile. Links with other educational providers in the area are satisfactory.

23. **Thorough observation of teaching and learning has taken place in the two areas of learning particularly identified as unsatisfactory.** The quality of teaching has improved. Management of the curriculum is good, enhanced by the formation of a curriculum planning and development group to share good practice.

24. Equality and diversity are satisfactory across the organisation. It is particularly good that MACLS uses outreach workers in the local community to promote the ESOL provision. Promotion of equality and diversity is satisfactory. Widening participation activities have been severely hampered by MACLS's inability to bid for collaborative funding. MACLS uses a wide range of data to monitor equality and diversity.

25. MACLS's self-assessment process is established. The organisation has used an interim self-assessment report produced in March 2006 well to monitor the improvements made and to contribute to the new self-assessment report.

26. **The organisation's implementation of the skills for life strategy has been slow.** This has resulted in some unsatisfactory teaching in literacy and numeracy. Skills for life is the government's strategy on training in literacy, numeracy and the use of language.

Leadership and management

Strengths

- good strategic activities
- good implementation of post-inspection actions

Weaknesses

- slow implementation of skills for life strategies

Information & communications technology

Using IT

Strengths

- very good achievement and retention rates
- good attainment of skills and knowledge
- very good teaching
- very good range of provision
- outstanding curriculum leadership and management

Weaknesses

- no significant weaknesses identified

Hospitality, sport, leisure & travel

Leisure, sport and recreation

Strengths

- good health and social benefits for most learners
- good tutoring skills in most classes

Weaknesses

- insufficient partnership arrangements to widen the participation of learners from under-represented groups
- insufficient activity-specific risk assessments

Visual & performing arts & media

Arts

Strengths

- good development of practical skills
- good celebration of learners' work
- significant personal enrichment
- good resources

Weaknesses

- ineffective initial assessment
- insufficient challenges to extend creativity
- insufficient progression opportunities

Foundation programmes

ESOL

Strengths

- high and much-improved attendance and achievement rates
- good range of accessible provision
- good teaching
- outstanding leadership and management

Weaknesses

- insufficient opportunities to achieve accreditation

Literacy and numeracy

Strengths

- good attainment of personal skills for many learners
- improved achievement and retention
- good responsive range of provision
- good learning support and guidance

Weaknesses

- poor teaching in many lessons

Family learning

Adult and community learning

Strengths

- good development of learners' personal skills
- interesting and engaging teaching in most lessons
- wide range of responsive programmes to widen the participation of learners from under-represented groups

Weaknesses

- insufficiently thorough planning of course requirements in outreach centres
- insufficiently thorough planning for some lessons

DETAILED REINSPECTION FINDINGS

LEADERSHIP AND MANAGEMENT

Grade 2

Strengths

- good strategic activities
- good implementation of post-inspection actions

Weaknesses

- slow implementation of skills for life strategies

27. Since the previous inspection in April 2005, the provision has been effectively realigned into the portfolio for economic development, skills and leisure. This has positioned the organisation effectively within the sector that is mainly adult and community centred. It aligns MACLS with a number of other services that have a key focus on social and economic regeneration activities in Medway. The organisation recognises that there was a strong need for it to improve. The council had not carried out any improvements for at least eight years, during which time there had been a moratorium on raising fees. MACLS's profile has been significantly raised within the local community and has allowed it to move forward. Medway council has been effective in creating local contacts with other managers in the portfolio, such as leisure services. This has enabled good opportunities for MACLS to assist the management of adult community learning in aspects such as marketing and financial management. Further good links have been made with Medway libraries through this realignment. The increased use of library stock has been instigated by locating collections of suitable books, particularly for those for literacy and numeracy into two of the main centres. There has been a good increase in the use of libraries as venues for adult learning classes. MACLS has developed its partnership links with other learning providers.

28. Liaison with the local further education college has taken place to reduce duplication in curriculum offer. MACLS has established closer links with the higher education sector and the organisation has strategies to consider sharing facilities and resources, and encourage the movement of learners from adult education to higher education. MACLS has a number of significant financial pressures and it has taken action to respond to these challenges. A full review and restructuring of the service is in the final stages of completion, together with a review of the use of some of their centres and a phased increase in course fees.

29. MACLS has made significant improvements to rectify the weaknesses identified at the previous inspection. This applies particularly to the major weaknesses in leadership and management of insufficient resources and structures to manage the curriculum, and inadequate systems for quality improvement.

30. MACLS identified priorities in the post-inspection action plan using a traffic light system and it has now identified that all actions are satisfactory or better. Significant changes in the management of the curriculum had been implemented with the formation of a curriculum planning and development group. This has provided a good forum to share ideas and good practice and identify any issues relating to curriculum development. One

of the major outcomes of this group is that it is now using data effectively to ascertain participation rates, cancellation of courses, and achievement and retention rates. Major changes have taken place, particularly with senior members of staff, and the drive to ensure that improvements are made has been continued. The organisation has piloted and reviewed a number of activities, such as initial assessment, and clearly identified new processes to ensure that tutors carry out the recording of learners' progress and achievement. MACLS has implemented a thorough process of observation of teaching and learning supported by funding from the local LSC. The process ensures that the organisation observes 100 per cent of all tutors in those areas that were identified as unsatisfactory at the previous inspection. MACLS is also using the observation of teaching and learning to audit the tutors' records. It has recently implemented an online staff development programme where staff can log in and use online learning programs to develop their management, and teaching and learning skills.

31. MACLS has been slow to implement a whole organisational approach to skills for life. The skills for life strategy is only in draft form, as is the skills for life handbook for staff. Although some senior managers have completed some relevant skills for life training, overall senior managers have not received skills for life intuitive training as identified in the action plan. Some skills for life staff are not sufficiently aware of the wider requirements and availability of resources to implement a high standard of literacy and numeracy teaching. This is reflected in the poor teaching grades in the foundation area of literacy and numeracy. Training for staff to offer skills for life training at level 3 is only targeted for delivery in July 2006.

32. In English and modern languages, the team has been effective in implementing changes required to rectify the weaknesses identified at the inspection in April 2005. New processes for initial screening are in place and curriculum managers have liaised effectively with the skills for life team to ensure that any potential learner who wishes to study for a general certificate of secondary education (GCSE) in mathematics or English is placed on an appropriate level of course. MACLS has changed its advice and guidance so that learners are clear about the requirements needed and the content of each programme. The organisation has implemented an effective observation of teaching and learning and, where deficiencies have been identified, curriculum managers are very prompt in developing a detailed and effective action plan to provide support for tutors.

Equality of opportunity

Contributory grade 3

33. MACLS uses a good range of data to monitor trends within each subject area, including the participation of learners for minority ethnic groups, learning disabilities, gender and age, particularly of those over 60 years old. Managers set targets and use any significant variances in performance to help develop curriculum planning. The LSC has sent revised targets for the number of learners from minority ethnic groups and MACLS is on target to achieve this. Retention and achievement rates are high among learners who have declared a disability, with a retention rate of 90.7 per cent that represents an increase of 5 per cent from the previous year. The organisation has good links with a range of community organisations, particularly the Race Equality Council. There are good processes by which MACLS promotes ESOL and prints information in a variety of languages. The organisation collaborates well with community organisations to make provision available to a range of under-represented learners, such as Bangladeshi women.

34. MACLS has produced an equal opportunities strategy and policy which it has reviewed

recently to bring it in line with changes in legislation. Although there has been some staff development to promote differential learning in teaching, cultural diversity is insufficient across all aspects of the provision. Equality and diversity are included in induction and there are some sensitive and imaginative ways of promoting the understanding to new learners. Attention to diversity in teaching is looked at as part of the observation of teaching and learning programme. The attention to diversity is satisfactory in most areas and no learner is discriminated against. The process that deals with differentiation is relatively new and is not fully established across all curriculum areas. Improvements are taking place with regards to the accessibility of buildings and accommodation, and in particular the refurbishment of the Rochester Centre, which will enhance accommodation for those with disabilities. MACLS has good professional links with other organisations such as Art for Life, which is an independent charitable trust supporting those with mental health disabilities. MACLS provides the venue for the activities adjacent to the Rochester Centre. Many of their learners also participate in other support and learning activities, such as cooking and fitness. The links with schools have enabled family learning to take place effectively, particularly in areas where there is very low achievement of GCSEs. This is effective in raising the awareness of the profile of learning within the community. Access to all the main centres is satisfactory and when the alterations are complete at Rochester, they will be improved further.

35. MACLS has been hampered severely by its inability to bid for extra money such as neighbourhood learning in deprived communities and monies from the European Social Fund. This has restricted its ability to widen the participation of learners from under-represented groups and to join in partnership agreements with other local organisations to bid collaboratively.

Quality improvement

Contributory grade 3

36. MACLS has made a number of changes to the quality improvement process. It produced a new quality improvement framework in September 2005 and reviewed it in March 2006, setting out the strategy, policy, roles and responsibilities for different groups and staff. These frameworks are fairly new and MACLS has yet to fully establish them across all areas of provision. The aim is to ensure that they are in place for the new academic year in 2006-07. Access to this information has improved, and is available electronically and in hard copy. The organisation has implemented regular audits, particularly of course files, and it has issued clear guidance about their content and use. It has also introduced a programme of observation of teaching and learning, with particular focus on the unsatisfactory areas of learning. Three trained observers carry out the observation of teaching and learning and the target is for 100 per cent observation of the unsatisfactory areas of learning and 50 per cent of all other areas in the academic year. MACLS is on target to achieve this. The effect of this process is starting to show improvements in the quality of teaching in most of the areas of learning. Although the observers are not subject specific, their observations have been supported by curriculum managers who carry out supportive monitoring visits to assure that any issues relating to the subject can be rectified. MACLS is also using this to help tutors maintain satisfactory records of learners' progress.

37. The increased use of data has been supported by the introduction of an effective management information system and all curriculum leaders have received good training on the use of data. Curriculum managers are now using data effectively, for example in one particular area where it was identified that retention was falling on a particular course, an

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action plan was put in place immediately and effectively to rectify the situation. The recognition and recording of progress and achievement process has been implemented, and MACLS continues to use it across all areas. Training and support have been given and there are improvements in the use of learners' outcomes and tutors' assessment records. Further guidance on improvements in recording the stages of the recognition and recording of progress and achievement process have been given to all tutors for implementation for the next academic year.

38. The self-assessment process was reviewed in September 2005. For the first time, all staff, including those in business services and support, were involved in the self-assessment process. MACLS produced guidance forms and this was particularly welcomed by part-time tutors, especially those in ICT, to enable them to contribute to the process. The organisation produced an interim self-assessment report at the end of March 2006. It used this effectively to ensure that staff working across areas of learning are clear about their contribution to individual reports and can see how it is using data. It is a working document used by staff, it is updated regularly, and it is contributing to the next self-assessment report. The interim report contains a wealth of data, such as the percentage of courses cancelled and the number of enrolments, and includes headings such as equality and diversity, continuing professional development in the curriculum area, teaching and learning, retention and achievement, and success. Most curriculum managers can explain immediately the reasons for the data within their subject areas.

AREAS OF LEARNING

Information & communications technology

Grade 1

Contributory areas:	Number of learners	Contributory grade
<i>Using IT</i> Adult and community learning	419	1 1

39. MACLS offers ICT courses at its main centres in Rochester, Gillingham, at the lifelong learning centre in Woodlands Road, and in five smaller venues around the area. During inspection week, 419 learners were enrolled on 133 courses. To date, MACLS has offered 219 courses and enrolled 1,233 learners. A full-time head of curriculum manages the curriculum, with one part-time curriculum leader and 20 part-time tutors.

Using IT

Strengths

- very good achievement and retention rates
- good attainment of skills and knowledge
- very good teaching
- very good range of provision
- outstanding curriculum leadership and management

Weaknesses

- no significant weaknesses identified

Achievement and standards

40. Achievement rates are very good and improving. At the previous inspection, the overall achievement rate was 95 per cent and it is now 98 per cent. Retention rates remain high, at 94 per cent. A large number of courses show 100 per cent retention and achievement rates. Attendance has also improved since the previous inspection. Attendance at observed lessons rose from 74 per cent to 80 per cent, with 100 per cent attendance at many lessons. Tutors were aware of, and follow up, reasons for non-attendance. There were no unauthorised absences in the lessons observed. Monitoring of overall attendance patterns has improved since the previous inspection and it is now good.

41. Learners' attainment of skills and knowledge is good. MACLS has maintained this strength effectively. It sets the learners challenging targets and a range of activities to suit their needs. Learners' work is of a consistently high standard. The organisation makes good use of well-laid-out displays to show learners' work and encourage others to achieve high standards. Learners on non-accredited courses develop good skills and discipline. Many learners use their skills effectively, both in the workplace and to meet their personal and vocational goals. Learners' awareness of health and safety issues is high.

The quality of provision

42. Teaching is consistently very good. Most lessons are extremely good learning environments, with excellent examples of collaborative learning. Tutors use a wide variety of activities very effectively to maintain learners' interest and meet their differing learning needs. They respond to questions from learners promptly and provide excellent clarification to prevent misunderstanding. Learners work well individually and in small and larger groups, with good focus on the subject and achieving the objectives. Tutors make very good use of a variety of resources to illustrate aspects of the topic. Reinforcement of health and safety is particularly good, with learners regularly and effectively encouraged to adopt the correct posture when using computers. Of the 10 lessons observed, two were grade 1, six a grade 2 and one a grade 3.

43. Lessons are supportive environments, with good attention to each learners' needs. The tutor and other learners provide support. Support from tutors is swift, sensitive and helps learners to progress with their work. Tutors have a consistently high level of awareness of classroom activities while giving individual support. They make good use of open questions to recap topics and check learners' understanding. Tutors monitor the learners' progress thoroughly and effectively. For example, the tutor in one lesson made good use of a quiz.

44. The range of provision is very good. This strength has been improved upon since the previous inspection. Learners are able to progress from entry level to level 2 in many subjects. For example, in digital photography learners can start as beginners with no prior knowledge, and progress to intermediate and then advanced level. Learners can choose to follow accredited or non-accredited courses, or a mixture. Provision includes standard courses such as a basic computer literacy course and an examination-based qualification in information technology (IT) and also, non-accredited but popular topics, such as internet shopping. There has been a slight decline in the total number of courses offered. A wide range of options is available for those learners who have never used a computer before, and is provided at different times and venues to suit them. Short taster courses provide learners with a good opportunity to sample computer topics and help them to decide which course to follow. Tutors make good reference to progression opportunities in lessons. MACLS is particularly effective at monitoring developments in courses available to ensure learners have the opportunity to study the newest courses, such as ITQ, the new IT user national vocational qualification (NVQ). Also provision of ICT as a skill for life at entry level 3 is planned for September 2006. Course cancellation rates are closely monitored and corrective actions taken. The rate of cancellations has been reduced by 4 per cent since the previous year.

45. Initial assessment has improved since the previous inspection and it is now satisfactory. MACLS interviews all learners before enrolling them on the course. Learners receive clear guidance about course entry requirements and good advice about their options. Course information posters are well designed and make effective use of software presentations to indicate the subject content. Recording of initial assessment is generally satisfactory, although a few are not fully completed. Staff are fully aware of learners' abilities. Assessment of learners' additional needs is thorough and well recorded. Staff are well aware of learners' additional needs and provide effective support for them. In many lessons, other learners also provide effective support. In one lesson, the tutor handled a

medical emergency well and the class risk assessment referred clearly to the potential situation.

46. Tutors also carry out initial assessment of learners' skills at the start of the first lesson of a course. They use this information well to modify, within the limits of the syllabus, the course to meet the learners' requirements. For example, on one accredited course MACLS replaced one of the modules at the request of all of the learners.

Leadership and management

47. Curriculum leadership and management are outstanding. The head of the curriculum and the curriculum leader work together very well. Staff comment on the strong leadership and support that they receive. A strong focus on continuous improvement exists and MACLS has dealt with all of the weak aspects of the provision identified at the previous inspection. Communications within the curriculum area are excellent. Regular staff meetings are well attended and the organisation uses them effectively to share good practice. MACLS makes good use of an internet-based forum for staff to discuss and share aspects of the provision.

48. MACLS maintains good links with other local providers and the wider educational and ICT community. Management staff keep fully up to date with the latest developments in ICT provision and MACLS has been used to piloting new qualifications. Monitoring of the quality of provision is strong. Staff are well qualified and their training and development are a priority. Most of them either hold or are working towards higher-level teaching qualifications and many have relevant commercial experience.

49. Regular observations of teaching and learning contribute effectively to staff development. Observations are thorough and MACLS's awarded grade profile closely matches that given on inspection. Staff are fully involved in the self-assessment process, which makes good use of feedback from learners and is also based on input from staff and other agencies. MACLS makes excellent use of data to contribute to the self-assessment process and the monitoring of the quality of provision generally. The organisation makes detailed analyses of learners' achievements under a wide range of categories, including performance by minority ethnic group. MACLS keeps its staff well informed of their overall performance.

50. The organisation's monitoring of progress of actions in the development plan is thorough. It keeps clear records and holds regular staff meetings to discuss progress. MACLS makes good use of measurable targets to measure success. The self-assessment report has improved and the current version is a detailed and accurate analysis of the provision. MACLS pays good attention to equality of opportunity. The ICT provision is fully compliant with the Disability and Discrimination Act 1995 and all of the organisation's training centres provide access for wheelchair users. A wide range of adaptive aids are available for learners.

Hospitality, sport, leisure & travel**Grade 3**

Contributory areas:	Number of learners	Contributory grade
<i>Leisure, sport and recreation</i>		3
Adult and community learning	815	3

51. Health and fitness represents approximately 10 per cent of MACLS's overall provision. Enrolments in this area of learning represent 14 per cent of all adult and community learning enrolments across the area. At the time of inspection, 815 learners made 1,267 enrolments on 71 courses, all of which are non-accredited. In 2005-06, 86 per cent of learners were women, 23 per cent were between 50 and 59 years old, with 41 per cent were aged over 60. New learners represent 20 per cent of those enrolled. MACLS offers 71 health and fitness courses throughout the year, ranging from exercise, bridge and golf to archery, badminton, tai chi, yoga and swimming. Specialist courses are available for people over 60 years old. Progression is available in some areas, but most classes are mixed ability. Classes take place at eight venues, which include dedicated adult learning centres, schools and one leisure centre. Courses are provided during the day and in the evenings. Most courses recruit termly or half yearly and last for between four and 17 weeks. There are 20 part-time tutors. A curriculum leader and a head of curriculum are currently responsible for the co-ordination of the programme area.

Leisure, sport and recreation*Strengths*

- good health and social benefits for most learners
- good tutoring skills in most classes

Weaknesses

- insufficient partnership arrangements to widen the participation of learners from under-represented groups
- insufficient activity-specific risk assessments

Achievement and standards

52. Learners in most sessions are fully engaged and highly motivated. Most learners report good health and social benefits from their involvement in courses in the area, including increased mobility and flexibility, stress control and reduced joint pain. Focus is on the maintenance of fitness and mobility, as opposed to an increase in fitness levels for most learners. For example, learners use the classes to recover from or minimise the effects of strokes, heart problems, breast cancer and Parkinson's disease, as well as arthritis, osteoporosis and asthma. One learner stated that 'if it wasn't for yoga I wouldn't be here now!' and another stated that classes have provided a lifeline. Other learners report that they have to visit the doctor less often or have been able to reduce medication and are able to do more for themselves at home. Learners of all ages enjoy improvements in their stamina and strength, and some report that they appreciate the opportunity to control their weight more effectively. In yoga, bridge and tai chi, learners are mentally stimulated while remembering long and complex sequences of movements and mathematical calculations.

The social side is important to older learners who are isolated within the community. Learners report increased confidence and self-esteem through their involvement with MACLS. Many learners meet new friends through classes and socialise outside of them.

53. Achievement rates are 92 per cent and are satisfactory. Achievement on the non-accredited courses is judged on achievement of the individual learning plan. Retention rates are also satisfactory at 89 per cent. Most learners complete their courses, with many courses maintaining close to 100 per cent retention rates. Attendance during inspection was recorded at 73 per cent and is satisfactory.

The quality of provision

54. In the best sessions, motivated and committed tutors encourage the learners with some inspirational teaching. Of the 13 lessons observed, one was a grade 1, four were grade 2 and eight were grade 3, with no unsatisfactory lessons observed. In every session, learners enjoy the experience to develop their skills with the support of their tutors. Tutors successfully cater for a diverse range of ability levels and impairments. Differentiation between learners in sessions is good and tutors offer them alternatives to ensure that they are fully involved. For example, tutors teach tai chi and yoga to people with various injuries and ailments, all of whom are encouraged to work to their own level under the tutors' expert empathetic supervision. In most classes, tutors analyse individual learners' performance and advise them on improvements or alternatives and in using a variety of appropriate and sensitive teaching and coaching methods. This results in an immediate improvement in form, posture and technique, and ensures safe practice.

55. In the better sessions, planning is very good. Learners are challenged and tutors provide a high level of support to learners, with effective differentiation. In the weaker classes, some poor technique or posture is not corrected. MACLS uses initial assessments adequately to provide differentiated learning for all participants. Teaching and learning are satisfactory. The development of practical skills, as highlighted in the previous report, is still strong in this area.

56. Learners are able to access satisfactory advice and guidance for progression through the nextstep office located at the Gillingham centre.

57. MACLS's recording of learners' progress is satisfactory. It has introduced individual learning plans and these were present in all of the lessons observed. However, their usefulness is limited, as they do not always clearly identify the goals that need to be achieved in non-accredited provision. Tutors encourage the learners to be engaged fully in the process and some tutors have developed their own innovative systems of recording progress. For example, in one class a yoga tutor used digital photos and a badminton tutor used a detailed system incorporating graphs and charts. MACLS has developed new individual learning plans and these are ready to use. The curriculum managers have developed some good progression routes. For example some learners have received support to become tutors and tutor trainers in specialist subjects. The range of provision to meet the needs of learners is satisfactory. There is a fairly varied range of courses available to the learners. The provision in this area of learning particularly matches the needs of older learners. Tutors are adept at encouraging maximum participation and the support offered to learners is satisfactory.

Leadership and management

58. MACLS has sufficient management, structures and resources in place to develop the curriculum. It has good strategic vision and direction in this area of learning. Curriculum meetings take place termly and some curriculum development is planned. Little partnership activity is evident at present, but discussion is taking place with other organisations in the region to develop collaborative provision such as swimming. MACLS uses targets appropriately to improve the quality of its provision. It uses data sufficiently to help develop curriculum planning and monitoring. For example, it uses and analyses end-of-course evaluations, absentee monitoring and feedback forms. The monitoring of staff qualifications is satisfactory. The information concerning qualifications is managed well and it is easily accessible. All tutors are suitably qualified. Tutors are supported to complete paperwork forming part of the quality assurance system. Where documents have been produced, the checking and analysis of this material through the tutor file audit are effective and successfully identify material which fails to contain sufficient detail.

59. Quality monitoring is satisfactory. Quality improvement meetings take place each month. The self-assessment report is sufficiently self-critical. The post-inspection action plan deals effectively with the issues raised. The curriculum management in this area is making every effort to get the support systems for the area right. The observations of the teaching and learning system is not fully established. Curriculum managers have observed 84 per cent of tutors. Sixty-four per cent have received external observations from the quality improvement team. The profile by non-subject specialists is inconsistent with the observations on inspection week. In some cases, the observations are over-graded and do not identify weaknesses, while in others particularly good practice has not been recognised. The system is providing good feedback to tutors and it is improving the quality of teaching. The content of course files are new, tutors are supported in training for the use of new systems and managers monitor its development. MACLS monitors and checks all document in a developing system of quality improvement. This is evident in the tutors' file audit, which records the quality of the tutors' documents in the area.

60. Measures to promote equality and diversity are satisfactory. MACLS has provided a number of courses to educate tutors and management in the issues around equality and diversity. The curriculum managers personally interview learners with any additional needs to assess their individual requirements and any additional support needs, and to ensure that they enrol onto the appropriate course at the right level. Although there is no specific work to include any marginalised groups from the community, classes are inclusive and access is not restrictive at any centre.

61. Accommodation is broadly satisfactory. There are some problems relating to the number of learners in popular classes in smaller rooms, but the curriculum management recognises this and has limited the number of people in these classes to minimise the effect on the learners. Satellite centres in school facilities are closely monitored by tutors to maintain safe practices in classes. Tutors in specific areas are adept at reducing risks and maintaining a high level of safety within classes. At one centre, a new facility is being built which will significantly improve accommodation for the area.

62. There are insufficient activity-specific risk assessments for the area. Risk assessments are carried out in all centres but in most cases, the content is not sufficiently specific to the activity taking place. The effect of the risk assessments not being detailed and specific is

minimised by the hard work of tutors who do a lot to keep learners safe. For example, one tutor brings his own broom to classes and cleans the area ready for the learners' use. Tutors effectively manage hazards that are not risk assessed. In a few sessions the tutor has written additional material onto forms and has assessed hazards and put measures in place to minimise their effect. However, health and safety are satisfactory within sessions. Tutors have a good understanding of the requirement to run safe classes and no learners are at risk in the area's activities.

63. MACLS has insufficient partnership arrangements to widen the participation of learners from under-represented groups. It has not developed successful partnerships with other agencies to widen participation and extend the reach of provision to the whole community. There is one such project in action at the time of the inspection. The organisation's most recent self-assessment report outlined partnerships being developed between MACLS and various agencies, but these are not in place. There are no partnerships to widen the participation of learners from any marginalised group in the communities of Rochester, Chatham, Gillingham and Rainham. There are plans to establish a series of yoga classes for pregnant women in co-operation with the maternity departments of local hospitals.

Visual & performing arts & media**Grade 3**

Contributory areas:	Number of learners	Contributory grade
Arts		3
Adult and community learning	1,746	3

64. MACLS offers a range of art and craft courses in the creative studies department. These include drawing and painting, life and portrait, ceramics, sculpture, woodcarving, stained glass, iconography, mosaic, calligraphy, jewellery and silversmithing, paper and textile crafts, patchwork quilting, garment construction, dressmaking, needlecraft, bobbin lace-making, cross-stitch embroidery, upholstery and soft furnishing, and level 2 accredited courses in photography, stained glass, interior décor and GCSE photography. There is a small performing arts provision which includes traditional and modern dancing, Egyptian dance, guitar, singing, keyboarding, and drama.

65. In 2005-06 there are 242 classes in art, craft and fashion and 60 classes in drama, singing and dance. At the time of inspection there are 94 art, craft and fashion classes, and four music classes. In the current academic year, 1,305 learners have made 2,701 enrolments on art, craft and fashion courses and 441 learners have made 652 enrolments on drama, dance and music.

66. The offer takes place in three main centres and five school-based centres. Most courses run for two hours in the daytime or evening over 10 to 36 weeks. MACLS offers shorter courses, including one-day and half-day classes. There are three curriculum managers in the area of learning, one is full time and two are fractional posts with responsibilities in other areas of learning. Forty-four tutors are employed on an hourly paid basis at the time of inspection.

Arts*Strengths*

- good development of practical skills
- good celebration of learners' work
- significant personal enrichment
- good resources

Weaknesses

- ineffective initial assessment
- insufficient challenges to extend creativity
- insufficient progression opportunities

Achievement and standards

67. Practical work is of a high standard in fashion and textiles, ceramics, calligraphy, mosaic, stained glass, painting and drawing, and dance. Learners develop good craft skills. In one dressmaking class, learners were altering commercial patterns to achieve a perfect

fit and were encouraged to embellish fabric to create individual garments. In a stained glass class, individual learners were producing confident work and expressing good knowledge of colour, including a large piece featuring beach huts from their own designs. In dance classes, learners rehearse and perform with increasing competence. In life drawing and painting, learners were working from a life model, producing confident pieces in a variety of media. A thematic project of 'Rain' stimulated exciting work in a variety of media across the creative arts area. An Easter egg cup competition generated lively 3D work from learners and tutors. However many learners in craft, copy from patterns or handouts and have yet to extend their practical skills into personal design development. Many class negotiated projects are unambitious and there is little engagement with historical or contemporary practice to stimulate ideas. Sketchbooks are not in general use.

68. Learners report increased confidence and self-esteem through attending classes and seeing their skills improve. They now have the confidence to try other skills and classes. For example, after many years of listening to the tutor and seeing work in progress, the life model is now a learner herself, with ambitions for attending art school. Social interaction in the groups is good, with learners sharing their knowledge and resources. Some learners are regaining manipulative skills after illness or improving their fitness and stamina in dance classes. One young learner is attending clay modelling and archery classes to maintain strength in combating a muscle-wasting illness.

69. Learners' work at all levels is celebrated around the main centres. At Rochester, there is a wide variety of work on display in cabinets and on boards. Mosaic panels have been designed for the canteen. A singing group performs at a variety of outside venues. A collaborative performance piece at Gillingham from a women-only art class was ambitious in scope, covering themes of transience, memory and identity using mixed media, including painting, music and art installation, which they are then going to exhibit at a local gallery. This group of learners, eight of whom are over 50, have created site-specific works outdoors, including the giant Mud Man on the banks of the river Medway, which received much press attention.

70. The retention rate has increased from 90 to 93 per cent. Achievement rates for accredited courses are high in almost every case. The percentage rate of achievers on MACLS's non-accredited courses is high at 91 per cent. Enrolments are stable.

The quality of provision

71. Tutors create a supportive learning environment where learners feel welcomed whatever their skills or abilities. Newsletters and notices on the studio walls remind learners of extra support that is available to them. Most staff are well qualified in their subject and some are practitioners in their field. Satisfactory advice and guidance on progression are available through the nextstep advisers, who have an office located at the Gillingham centre.

72. Good specialist accommodation and equipment are available at the main centres. The ceramic and jewellery studios, sculpture workshop, and 3D workshop, are particularly well equipped and maintained. Art studios are large and well lit, with sufficient easels, tables and sinks. Sewing rooms have good equipment, mirrors and fitting areas. Dance classes take place in large rooms with clean floors and mirrors. These resources allow for good learning to take place with facilities that would match those of commercial enterprises. At

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the community venues, accommodation for dance and music is satisfactory. Health and safety procedures are good. Risk assessments are incorporated into schemes of work. Learners are aware of the regulations relating to the control of substances hazardous to health and MACLS uses appropriate folders and labelling.

73. Teaching is satisfactory. The best lessons are well planned, move at a fast pace and encourage the learners to think creatively. Of the 23 lessons observed, two were a grade 1, 10 were grade 2, eight were grade 3 and three were grade 4. In some cases, learners discuss the progress of their work and ideas.

74. Many sessions lack planning, purpose and structure. Learners arrive in class and carry on activities from previous sessions with no introduction or sharing of learning outcomes by the tutor. The checking of learning is insufficient. Conclusions to lessons are poor and inconclusive, not linking learning between sessions. Outstanding practice was seen in supported learning but in other supported learning sessions, over-ambitious projects do not enable sequential skill-building and give the learners no sense of achievement. The products are disappointing. In the weakest lessons, a lack of planning and preparation result in incoherent outputs from learners. Information learning technology was used in only one session visited during the inspection.

75. In some classes, particularly in daytime provision, learners are not set sufficiently challenging targets for the development of creative and design skills while making progress on practical skills. Some learners in these classes have been attending for many years. Many of them copy images from other artists' work and from photographs/pattern books and are not engaged in investigating a personal creative language. Learners do not use diaries and sketchbooks widely as an aid to personal creative development. In some classes, beginners struggle and the tutors do not set challenging targets for more advanced learners. Poor planning, and in a few cases an apparent lack of planning expertise, has resulted in poor guidance for learners in these classes. In the weakest lessons there are no resources present or references to the wider context of the subject. While many of these weaknesses are recognised and recorded in the notes of classroom visits, there is still, at the time of reinspection, insufficient effect on the quality of learning for these classes.

76. Initial assessment is not carried out against the course learning outcomes which are provided to learners in the course information sheets before they enrol. In most classes, the individual learning plans record learners' own learning outcomes only. In one assessment exercise observed, the tutor distributed the individual learning plans and the learners considered them for a few seconds in silence and entered a date in the progress column. The individual learning plans were then collected up and put back in the file. In most classes seen there were individual written records of progress but these were completely separated out from the individual learning plans. On these progress sheets there was no reference to the course learning outcomes as a starting point for measuring the distance travelled in each case. All records of learners' progress are written. There is no evidence of effective recording of progress using video, photography or other media.

77. The range of courses in art and crafts is spread between the three main centres. However, there are no performing arts courses at Rochester due to the re-building, and no evening arts courses in the schools. Most classes offered are at mixed levels or 'all abilities'. Few are offered for complete beginners or exclusively at intermediate or advanced levels. In some lessons, there is insufficient differentiation in lesson planning to

meet the needs of all of the individuals present. There are few opportunities to progress to accredited courses, which are limited to a few subjects, all at level 2. A range of portfolio classes planned for this year was closed due to insufficient support, and MACLS has no formal access or links to further education. There is no evidence of formal links with University College for the Creative Arts at Canterbury, other universities, or the local further education college for these subjects.

Leadership and management

78. Curriculum management is satisfactory. A head of curriculum and two fractional curriculum leaders manage the creative arts provision. The curriculum leaders act as heads of outer centres, where they are based for evening provision. This works effectively. During inspection week there was a problem with the fire alarm ringing at random intervals. The manager gave learners free refreshments and a voucher to use against further courses.

79. Progress has been made since the previous inspection by establishing course files, which the tutors keep. These include schemes of work and lesson plans with space for evaluation and forward planning, and health and safety documents. Tutors are required to monitor their course files regularly but some are incomplete or insufficiently detailed. The head of curriculum does not hold schemes of work centrally or internally verify them. Course information sheets are clear, with specific and meaningful learning outcomes in many cases. Tutors use the self-assessment process well within the area and welcome the opportunity to contribute to the process.

80. Curriculum managers carry out monitoring visits to classes. In addition to the formal observations of teaching and learning visits, 98 per cent of tutors have had monitoring/support visits since the previous inspection. Grades are not conferred on these visits. Copies of visit reports are sent to the quality assurance manager, with recommendations for training and support. This creates an overview of support and help needed across the programme area. Managers have analysed these support needs alongside an analysis of teacher-training statistics to build a picture of training needs within the department. There has been a 10 per cent increase in enrolments on teacher-training programmes since the previous inspection. The effect on teaching and learning of these initiatives is beginning to show through in the improved inspection grade profile for this programme area.

81. Equal opportunities is satisfactory. While one class was previously offered for Asian dressmakers, the proportion of learners from minority ethnic groups was low. The 'Rain' project used images from Europe, Japan and India, but diverse cultural references are rarely made in lessons. Artists mentioned are mainly European. However, in Egyptian dance, the learners were made aware of the political, social and cultural background of their studies.

Foundation programmes**Grade 2**

Contributory areas:	Number of learners	Contributory grade
<i>ESOL</i> Adult and community learning	501	2 2
<i>Literacy and numeracy</i> Adult and community learning	365	3 3

82. At the time of inspection, 501 learners were attending one of 70 ESOL classes. Since September 2005, 703 learners have enrolled on one or more classes, while 612 learners had attended in 2004-05. Programmes are differentiated for identified skills levels, from entry 1 to level 2. Most classes cover all four language skills, but learners may choose to attend classes that concentrate on reading and writing, or speaking and listening. Most classes take place over 31 weeks, with learners attending for two hours each week. Courses take place throughout the week, 30 during the morning, 24 during the afternoon and 16 in the evening. Most classes are held at the two main centres in Rochester and Gillingham, with classes in five outreach centres in the area. Twenty-nine tutors teach on the programmes, supported by a full-time head of curriculum and two curriculum leaders. Two outreach curriculum leaders work in the community and an education adviser provides advice and guidance. ESOL accounts for over 9 per cent of MACLS's provision.

83. At the time of inspection, 365 learners attend one of 46 accredited literacy and numeracy courses. Fifteen courses were taking place at the time of inspection. Courses include English and mathematics workshops and Gateway to English or mathematics, and these take place over 31 weeks, with learners attending for two hours each week. Short courses take place in response to need. Courses take place throughout the week during the morning, afternoon and evening, and occasionally on Saturdays. Most courses take place at the two main centres in Rochester and Gillingham, with some evening provision taking place in three other outreach centres in the area. A third of the learners are men and just over 10 per cent come from minority ethnic groups. Fourteen tutors and seven learning support assistants teach on the programmes, supported by a full-time head of curriculum, a full-time curriculum leader and a part-time senior tutor. Literacy and numeracy accounts for 7 per cent of MACLS's provision.

ESOL*Strengths*

- high and much-improved attendance and achievement rates
- good range of accessible provision
- good teaching
- outstanding leadership and management

Weaknesses

- insufficient opportunities to achieve accreditation

Achievement and standards

84. Attendance rates have improved since the previous inspection. In March 2005, the rate of attendance was 70 per cent and it increased to 74 per cent in March 2006. During the previous inspection, the average attendance rate was 61 per cent and at this inspection it has been 83 per cent. Attendance is lower in evening classes, which many shift workers attend. This improvement in attendance has been made although the learner population has changed significantly. Over the past year, the percentage of learners who come from the additional 10 European Union countries has increased from 10 to 37 per cent, and many of these learners work irregular hours and are not permanently settled in the area. When learners are unable to attend, tutors maintain contact by e-mail using the learners' internet group site. Tutors also provide work when learners request it, for example when they are going on an extended visit to their country of origin.

85. Learners' attainment continues to be very good and most learners are delighted with their progress in the language skills they are working to improve. They develop confidence and are able to use English in their lives and work. At all levels, most learners are achieving their personal learning targets. Learners at all levels are encouraged to take skills for life ESOL tests in the relevant language skills. Although most learners take examinations in the summer, already since September 2005 195 learners have taken examinations and achieved 359 passes.

86. However, there are insufficient opportunities for learners to achieve accreditation. Tests are held only four times a year, which is not sufficiently flexible for learners, especially those who may need to leave the area at short notice to improve their employment opportunities. There are clear progression routes and most learners progress to higher-level ESOL courses. The rate of retention is good at 89 per cent.

The quality of provision

87. The range of provision is good and responsive. The management team analyses and uses data to target the provision effectively, and while in 2004-05 nine classes were cancelled, only three classes have been cancelled in the current academic year. Classes meet the needs of learners at all levels. In addition, learners can choose to attend a class which focuses on particular language skills, such as speaking and listening. Some classes are for specific language groups, such as the Chinese elderly group. Others support learners by providing additional tutorial assistance. In addition to formal classes, two reading groups take place which the librarian from the local public library attends monthly. Learners may use the IT facilities in the two main centres at any time. For learners at entry level 3 and above who are unable to attend classes regularly, MACLS is planning to provide blended learning, which combines e-learning with a variety of other delivery methods to increase the learning experience.

88. The standard of teaching is good. Of the nine lessons observed, one was graded 1, five were graded 2 and three were graded 3. There were no unsatisfactory lessons observed. Tutors plan lessons thoroughly to meet the learners' needs. Tutors identify learning targets clearly and check and record learning. The marking policy provides continuity for learners as they progress to higher-level classes. Individual learning plans are working documents, and learners at all levels use them. Tutors establish a supportive learning environment in which learners feel confident to speak, while correcting

pronunciation and word patterns. The good pace of lessons challenges learners. A wide variety of stimulating activities reinforce learning. Tutors prompt learners, elicit responses, and give clear explanations. Resources include real-life objects and attractive picture and language prompts.

89. The level of learning support is good. Learners with physical disabilities receive additional support. Learners with suspected specific learning difficulties are referred for dyslexia assessments, and learners with suspected learning difficulties or disabilities are referred for assessment. The education adviser refers learners to a range of education and training providers, as well as to other services, including counselling and the Asian women's refuge. Placements are arranged for voluntary work and NVQ courses. Highly effective presentations about the routes to citizenship are made to mixed groups of learners and tutors. This has a significant effect in helping learners as well as increasing the understanding of citizenship in the wider community. Learners who wish to gain advice and guidance on progression are able to do so through the nextstep advisers, who visit a number of the centres and have an office located at the Gillingham centre.

Leadership and management

90. Leadership and management are outstanding. The head of curriculum, four curriculum leaders and an education adviser work as a very strong team, with a deep commitment to the learners and the service. Self-assessment is a well-integrated process and the team are highly self-critical. The team has made a very effective strategic response to rectify the weaknesses identified in the 2005 inspection. The comprehensive development plan included imaginative initiatives that have been implemented successfully within a reduced budget. Individual assessments and inductions are now carried out for groups of learners before the start of courses, in order to place learners on a class at an appropriate level. Learners may now join a class at a restricted number of times during the year, and transfers between classes are authorised only by managers. There are now few disruptions to lessons and learning, and learners and tutors have welcomed these changes.

91. MACLS is commissioning a dedicated skills for life information system, but meanwhile the management team has manually collected meaningful data and used it to help develop planning and review of all aspects of the provision. There is very good professional staff support and good development opportunities. Communication is very good, through personal contact and through the MACLS intranet and the staff internet group site, which is used to share information and to raise and respond to issues as they arise. The organisation makes good use of opportunities to share good practice at staff meetings and training events. Well-qualified staff are further developing their specialist ESOL skills at stage 3 and level 4. Two managers maintain their professional expertise through teaching on staff training courses at the professional development centre nearby.

92. The management team has established a culture of learners taking responsibility, while at the same time maintaining good support for them. There is good integration of wider life skills. Staff set learners' expectations at induction and learners are required to attend regularly and promptly, and notify the tutor if they are unable to attend, as they would be required to do at work. When learners first attend one of the classes they are taught how to telephone the centre, and many learners make contact by e-mail. When learners are absent and have not notified MACLS in advance, the outreach curriculum leaders contact them by telephone or by letter, and it has become the norm for learners to be accountable. The procedure was implemented in September 2005, and in the following term all absent

learners who had been contacted responded, and about one-quarter returned to classes.

93. Observations of teaching and learning and curriculum monitoring visits have been effective in improving the quality of the learners' experience in the classroom. MACLS seeks feedback from the learners and uses it to help develop planning.

94. Equality and diversity are very good. The outreach curriculum leaders are well known and respected in the local communities. Often a friend or family member will approach them informally to arrange an initial interview and assessment for a new or returning learner. Course information and letters are available in eight community languages and are being translated into a further three languages. The ESOL staff speak 14 community languages between them and, if necessary, it can be arranged for many learners to resolve any problems using their native language.

Literacy and numeracy

Strengths

- good attainment of personal skills for many learners
- improved achievement and retention
- good responsive range of provision
- good learning support and guidance

Weaknesses

- poor teaching in many lessons

Achievement and standards

95. Many learners develop much increased confidence, which extends beyond the skills they are learning in the classroom to their personal, family and working life. For example, individual learners reported that as a direct result of attending a class they have had confidence to deal with personal problems, handle their own money when shopping, or write reports at work. Several learners said that now they were able to help their children with their schoolwork, their children did their homework willingly.

96. Retention rates are good and are improving, from 76 per cent in 2004-05 to 84 per cent in 2005-06. Achievement rates are also improving and they are now good. Currently, 103 learners have passed the national tests at level 1 or level 2 in either literacy or numeracy. An additional 129 tests are arranged in the next two months. In the previous year, the total number of test achievements was 169. Since the previous inspection, MACLS has obtained approval for learners to take national qualifications at entry 3 and three learners have completed assignments, with an additional 15 to 20 learners expected to complete one of these qualifications by the end of the academic year. Many learners have progressed from level 2 to GCSE, further studies and employment. Attendance rates are satisfactory and during inspection the attendance rate was 74 per cent in the classes observed.

The quality of provision

97. There is a good and responsive range of provision. Although there are fewer classes than in 2004-05, the provision is well targeted. MACLS has responded to requests and met the needs of the community. For example, Gateway to English and mathematics classes focus on teaching learners who wish to take national tests in literacy and numeracy. Four classes for teaching assistants take place, three of them in schools. Short taster sessions take place during the summer to encourage new learners into the provision. Courses for disengaged young people take place in partnership with a local charity. Classes have been set up to support employees, such as facilities maintenance and medical staff in a local hospital.

98. MACLS's learning support and guidance are good. The organisation uses learning support staff effectively in classes to support individual learners. A series of revision days are available to provide additional help for learners preparing to take the national tests. A wide range of reading materials is available to support the learners' reading skills through establishing lending libraries in teaching rooms on two of the main sites. Library staff welcome learners' ideas on new stock and two learners have been invited to go with professional librarians to help them to select new books. MACLS took part in the national pilot of initial assessment online and it has since developed its own initial assessment tool, matched to national standards, which enables learners to identify their learning priorities better. The organisation also identifies and records the learners' preferred learning styles. It clearly records this information on the learners' individual learning plans. However, it does not use assessment information sufficiently well in many classes to help develop appropriate teaching.

99. There is poor teaching in many lessons. Of the nine lessons observed, five were graded 3 and four were graded 4. There is insufficient attention given to learning. Planning, delivery and assessment focus on the activities that learners will carry out, rather than the learning that they have achieved. There is insufficient focus on the needs of individuals and their interests. In one lesson, two learners who had come to class to study numeracy spent over a quarter of the lesson completing a literacy activity with the rest of the learners. Another learner who was beginning to read at a very basic level was given no visual material to help decode words. In many lessons, there is an over-reliance on handouts or working through exercises in textbooks with insufficient contextualisation of the skills taught. Teaching methods are insufficiently varied and do not involve the learners sufficiently. Questioning techniques to check learning are brief and fail to extend or stretch the learners' understanding. In some classes there is only one activity, or type of activity, planned for each learner in a two-hour session.

Leadership and management

100. Curriculum management is satisfactory. MACLS analyses and uses data to monitor and plan provision and the use of data is now no longer a weakness. For example, attendance was monitored by class and the tutors of those classes received extra support. The organisation is commissioning a skills for life management information system, but in the meantime it collects data manually. Communication with tutors is satisfactory, and they also use an intranet and a staff internet group site. Some graded observations of teaching and learning have taken place, as well as ungraded support visits. However, this has yet to affect on the learners' experience in the classroom. Each term, MACLS interviews learners

from one-third of the classes individually to get their feedback. The organisation identifies and remedies problems. In addition, there are exit interviews with learners who leave the provision.

Family learning**Grade 2**

Contributory areas:	Number of learners	Contributory grade
<i>Adult and community learning</i>		2
Adult and community learning	239	2

101. MACLS offers family learning as first steps into learning and regards it as a priority area. One hundred and seventeen learners attend a range of wider family learning courses which are all non-accredited. Fifteen courses were taking place at the time of inspection. Most courses are short and last between six and 10 hours, and include computing, first aid, 'cooking lunch with your toddler', 'learning to swim for parents and children', and building self-esteem. One hundred and twenty-two learners attend 10 family literacy, language and numeracy (FLLN) accredited classes. FLLN courses such as 'keeping up with the children' and 'early start' are offered and range in length from three-hour taster sessions to 72 hours. Fifty-one tutors teach family learning classes in schools, adult centres, a library and other community venues, mainly during the day and early evenings. Wider family learning, family courses for speakers of other languages and family literacy and numeracy courses are managed by three separate curriculum managers.

Adult and community learning*Strengths*

- good development of learners' personal skills
- interesting and engaging teaching in most lessons
- wide range of responsive programmes to widen the participation of learners from under-represented groups

Weaknesses

- insufficiently thorough planning of course requirements in outreach centres
- insufficiently thorough planning for some lessons

Achievement and standards

102. Learners develop good personal skills, particularly self-confidence and self-esteem. This was identified as a strength at the previous inspection. Learners enjoy finding out how their children learn, as well as developing their own skills. FLLN classes are very successful in helping adults understand what their children are learning at school. Learners feel more confident to be able to help children with homework, as well as having more positive relationships with them. Structured play sessions provide good and supportive environments for adults and children to work on tasks together. Adults have a greater understanding of how to encourage children to develop healthy-eating habits at home. Many classes help adults to increase their own self-esteem effectively so they feel more able to deal with their families and life generally.

103. Retention rates are high at 92 per cent on wider family learning courses and 94 per cent on FLLN. This includes all courses, many of which are short. All wider family learning

courses are non-accredited and achievement is based on the successful completion of individual learning plans. Achievement is satisfactory at 75 per cent. Fourteen learners on FLLN programmes in 2005-06 have achieved national accreditation at levels 1 or 2 in literacy or numeracy. Further learners are due to take tests before the end of the year. Attendance is also satisfactory at 72 per cent during the week of inspection. In most classes punctuality was good, although there were some exceptions to this and late arrivals were not challenged sufficiently.

The quality of provision

104. In most lessons, the teaching is interesting and engages learners well. Of the 10 lessons observed, one was graded 1, six were graded 2 and three were graded 3, with no unsatisfactory teaching observed. There is much good or better teaching which meets the needs of individual learners well, building on their prior knowledge and skills. This is a new strength since the previous inspection. Activities are clearly structured and taught in small stages ensuring that the learners experience success, gain in confidence and acquire new skills. Tutors encourage and support the learners sensitively to contribute and share their knowledge with other learners. Instructions and explanations are clear and easy to follow. Learners are attentive and well focused throughout lessons and find them interesting and enjoyable. The needs of individual learners are met well in group activities, as well as in individual tuition. In parent and child sessions, children and their parents/carers are fully engaged in the activities taking place. Lessons are well structured to ensure full participation by all family members at all times. Learners make good progress during lessons, developing their skills and increasing their knowledge.

105. There is a wide range of responsive programmes to widen the participation in learning of learners from under-represented groups. Effective partnerships with schools, young offenders' organisations, and minority ethnic organisations encourage adults into learning. Courses take place in a wide variety of accessible community venues where learners feel comfortable and at ease. Crèches and childcare are available if required. The length of courses and course content vary appropriately and successfully attract new learners into classes. Topics are relevant to learners' interests and motivations for attending, such as 'first aid for babies and toddlers' for users of Sure Start centres. Since the previous inspection, the number of cancelled wider family learning classes has been reduced significantly as courses are more effectively targeted. Many of the courses have taken account of new legislation regarding children and young people.

106. Assessment is satisfactory and provides useful information about learners' previous knowledge and experience. In FLLN classes, learners' literacy, language and numeracy skills are assessed appropriately using nationally standardised tests. Speaking and listening skills of language learners are also assessed. In many classes, tutors identify the learners' preferred learning styles. However, in a few classes the information gathered at assessment is not used sufficiently well to help develop teaching.

107. All learners receive information before they start on their course. For many ESOL family learning groups, this information is provided in appropriate minority languages. All learners are encouraged to think about what they might like to do once the course ends. The course tutor normally provides this information. Information to help them to do this is contained within the tutor's handbook. On some occasions, nextstep advisers also visit the wider family learning classes to advise on progression.

108. Planning for some lessons is insufficiently thorough. Although learners are engaged and find the lessons interesting, the supporting paperwork is unsatisfactory. Some lesson plans are weak and fail to identify the timing of different activities and breaks. Others contain too much content that can be realistically taught within a lesson. Insufficient consideration is given to meeting the needs of individual learners. Some activities are too easy, as they practise skills that the learners have already acquired and the pace of the lesson is too slow. In parent and child courses, there is insufficient focus on supporting the needs of adults to support their children's learning. Schemes of work for the longer family literacy and numeracy courses fail to mention the three strands that constitute such courses.

Leadership and management

109. All courses in outreach centres are negotiated with partner organisations and basic requirements of responsibilities are agreed. However, current systems do not always operate sufficiently thoroughly. Health and safety checks are made for all classes. However, there is an over-reliance on the tutor's own knowledge to ensure safety in high-risk environments. Equipment required for the satisfactory delivery of the course is not always available. The lines of communication as to who has responsibility to ensure these things are in place are not always clear. Some accommodation is unsuitable due to disruptions from other users. Managers closely monitor any problems and deal with them where possible.

110. Curriculum management is satisfactory. MACLS uses data to monitor and plan provision and the use of data is now no longer a weakness. The organisation has used data well to plan wider family learning courses such as those aimed at attracting men into family provision. It also uses data effectively to help develop the self-assessment process. Staff are appropriately qualified and tutors have now received training or information about recent legislation covering children and young people, a weakness identified at the previous inspection. Training to assist in recording learners' progress has been provided, although it is not always implemented sufficiently in some lessons. Managers have noted this and taken follow-up action. Specialist-subject tutors have received support to work in family learning. Accommodation is generally suitable in most locations and resources are appropriate for learners. Staff have a good understanding of health and safety, and tutors report any concerns and additional hazards and they usually take appropriate action. Since the previous inspection, more thorough and easier-to-use systems are now in place to manage improvements and monitor progression. Communication with tutors is satisfactory. Graded observations of teaching and learning take place as well as un-graded support visits. The system is satisfactory, although in the small sample available, grades were not always in agreement with grades awarded by inspectors. Equality of opportunity is satisfactory, although there is little promotion of equality and diversity issues in lessons, and it is not evident how they might be promoted on schemes of work. There has been a good response to translate materials into a variety of minority languages.

